

Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove. 5
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks 10
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

William Shakespeare

Since There's No Help

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly I myself can free. 5
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies; 10
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes—
Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!

Michael Drayton

So We'll Go No More A Roving

So, we'll go no more a roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath, 5
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon, 10
Yet we'll go no more a roving
By the light of the moon.

Byron

The Way Through the Woods

They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods 5
Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath,
And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods, 10
And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods
Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools 15
Where the otter whistles his mate,
(They fear not men in the woods,
Because they see so few.)
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
And the swish of a skirt in the dew, 20
Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
As though they perfectly knew
The old lost road through the woods.
But there is no road through the woods. 25

Rudyard Kipling

Presentiment

Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn
Indicative that suns go down;
The notice to the startled grass
That darkness is about to pass.

Emily Dickinson

Hope

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune—without the words,
And never stops at all,
And sweetest in the gale is heard; 5
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.
‘I’ve heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea; 10
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me’.

Emily Dickinson

Man is a Sacred City

Man is a sacred city, built of marvellous earth.
Life was lived nobly here to give this body birth.
Something was in this brain and in this eager hand.
Death is so dumb and blind, Death cannot understand.
Death drifts the brain with dust and soils the young limbs' glory. 5
Death makes women a dream and men a traveller's story,
Death drives the lovely soul to wander under the sky,
Death opens unknown doors. It is most grand to die.

John Masefield

Marriage Bell

Music and silver chimes and sunlit air,
Freighted with the scent of honeyed orange-flower;
Glad, friendly festal faces everywhere.
She, rapt from all in this unearthly hour,
With cloudlike, cast-back veil and faint-flushed cheek, 5
In bridal beauty moves as in a trance
Alone with him, and fears to breathe, to speak,
Lest the rare, subtle spell dissolve perchance.
But he upon that floral head looks down,
Noting the misty eyes, the grave sweet brow-- 10
Doubts if her bliss be perfect as his own,
And dedicates anew with inward vow
His soul unto her service, to repay
Richly the sacrifice she yields this day.

Emma Lazarus

Afterwards

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
'He was a man who used to notice such things'?

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless blink, 5
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
'To him this must have been a familiar sight.'

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm, 10
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, 'He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone.'

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more, 15
'He was one who had an eye for such mysteries'?

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
'He hears it not now, but used to notice such things'? 20

Thomas Hardy

Piano

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song 5
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour 10
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

D H Lawrence

La Figlia che Piange ('The Girl who Weeps'--Italian)

O quam te memorem virgo ... ('O how to name you, virgin' --Latin—a quotation from Virgil)

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
Lean on a garden urn—
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn 5
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left 10
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand, 15
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers. 20
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

T S Eliot

Memory

One had a lovely face,
And two or three had charm,
But charm and face were in vain
Because the mountain grass
Cannot but keep the form 5
Where the mountain hare has lain.

W B Yeats

The sound of silence

I saw the sealed lips of ancient walls
And though I asked
Who lived here
Who peered through that window
to watch the gathering storm 5
or the gentle evening
congealing to darkness
or morning melting to smiling skies
Who cooked in that hearth
now sewn together 10i
in a shroud of jungle grass
I heard not a word

I saw gashes
time-inflicted
time-healed 15
on the half-demolished stone-walls

and the lizard
hated messenger of death
slid-wriggled
flashing for one moment 20
before disappearing
into the stony silence

Then, looking at the silence
I knew the answer. 25

Daniel Kunene

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.
Aunt Jennifer's finger fluttering through her wool 5
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.
When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by. 10
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

Adrienne Rich

The Moment

The moment when, after many years
of hard work and a long voyage
you stand in the centre of your room,
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,
knowing at last how you got there, 5
and say, I own this,

is the same moment when the trees unloose
their soft arms from around you,
the birds take back their language,
the cliffs fissure and collapse, 10
the air moves back from you like a wave
and you can't breathe.

No, they whisper. You own nothing.
You were a visitor, time after time
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming. 15
We never belonged to you.
You never found us.
It was always the other way round.

Margaret Atwood

Stridulation Sonnet

Tiger beetles, crickets, velvet ants, all
know the useful friction of part on part,
how rub of wing to leg, plectrum to file,
marks territories, summons mates. How

a lip rasped over finely tined ridges can 5
play sweet as a needle on vinyl. But
sometimes a lone body is insufficient.
So the sapsucker drums chimney flashing

for our amped-up morning reveille. Or, 10
later, home again, the wind's papery
come hither through the locust leaves. The roof
arcing its tin back to meet the rain.

The bed's soft creak as I roll to my side.
What sounds will your body make against mine?

Jessica Jacobs

Are you the river or am I

are you the river or am i
do i flow into the sea or do you flow into me
why is it when i try to slake my thirst you disappear
when you try, i appear
you have never stopped calling me 5
i have never stopped answering you

whose longing elicited this longing in me
 whose love buried me in sorrow
 i, even i, even as i am
 know the loneliness of separation 10
 as sails of clouds, like memories
 flee across the windswept sky
 you are all that i love, all that i can love
 yet how do i love you, know you, know that i love you
 when all that you are remains unknown to me 15
 and all that i am is known only to you
 i carry within me the grief of all loving
 would you be different if i knew you
 would i be different - can a flower know
 what it means to be a flower 20
 all the silt of my journeying
 all the salt of my yearning flows into you
 and all longing, every love, all knowing, every loss
 everything you are comes to rest in me

Shabbir Banoobhai

Esther's Tomcat

Daylong this tomcat lies stretched flat
 As an old rough mat, no mouth and no eyes,
 Continual wars and wives are what
 Have tattered his ears and battered his head.

Like a bundle of old rope and iron 5
 Sleeps till blue dusk. Then reappear
 His eyes, green as ringstones; he yawns wide red,
 Fangs fine as a lady's needle and bright.

A tomcat sprang at a mounted knight,
 Locked round his neck like a trap of hooks 10
 While the knight rode fighting its clawing and bite.
 After hundreds of years the stain's there

On the stone where he fell, dead of the tom:
 That was at Barnborough. The tomcat still
 Grallochs odd dogs on the quiet, 15
 Will take the head clean off your simple pullet,

Is unkillable. From the dog's fury,
 From gunshot fired point-blank he brings
 His skin whole, and whole
 From owlsh moons of bekittenings 20

Among ashcans. He leaps and lightly
 Walks upon sleep, his mind on the moon.
 Nightly over the round world of men,
 Over the roofs go his eyes and outcry.

Ted Hughes

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

A free bird leaps on the back
Of the wind and floats downstream
Till the current ends and dips his wing
In the orange sun's rays
And dares to claim the sky. 5

But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage
Can seldom see through his bars of rage
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill 10
Of things unknown but longed for still
And his tune is heard on the distant hill for
The caged bird sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze 15
And the trade winds soft through
The sighing trees
And the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright
Lawn and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams 20
His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with 25
A fearful trill of things unknown
But longed for still and his
Tune is heard on the distant hill
For the caged bird sings of freedom.

Maya Angelou

Nightsong: City

Sleep well, my love, sleep well:
the harbour lights glaze over restless docks,
police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets;
from the shanties creaking iron-sheets
violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed 5
and fear is imminent as sound in the wind-swung bell;
the long day's anger pants from sand and rocks;
but for this breathing night at last;
my land, my love, sleep well.

Dennis Brutus

Rain

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been 5
Since I was born into solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain, 10
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain 15
Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be towards what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Edward Thomas

Hawk Roosting

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees! 5
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation 10
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body: 15
My manners are tearing off heads—

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right: 20

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

Ted Hughes

Exhortation

- Give over seeking bastard joy
Nor cast for fortune's side-long look.
Indifference can be your toy;
the bitter heart can be your book.
(Its lesson torment never shook.) 5
- In the cold heart, as on a page,
Spell out the gentle syllable
That puts short limit to your rage
And curdles the straight fire of hell,
Compassing all, so all is well. 10
- Read how, though passion sets in storm
And grief's a comfort, and the young
Touch at the flint when it is warm,
It is the dead we live among,
The dead given motion and a tongue. 15
- The dead, long trained to cruel sport
And the crude gossip of the grave;
The dead who pass in motley sort,
Whom sun nor sufferance can save.
Face them. They sneer. Do not be brave. 20
- Know once for all: their snare is set
Even now; be sure their trap is laid;
And you will see your lifetime yet
Come to their terms, your plans unmade,—
and be belied, and be betrayed. 25

Louise Bogan

Crocodile

- I saw you once, half-in half-out
a pit of dirty greenish water.
Walls and bars surrounded you
and children's laughter echoed
emptily through other cages, 5
through the stink of pissed-on straw.
You lay under a dripping tap,
a wet plonking on your back
of beaten shoes and handbags.
One bulging green-veined eyeball 10
slowly opened once or twice.
Was it content or a sleepy drowse
that, with your long travelling mouth set
almost in a smile, you lay so for hours?
I thought you well contained: 15
in pit, in reptile house, in zoo,
park and town—seas and seas
away from where you chose.
Or it didn't matter—that anywhere
you would lie so, elbows out, 20
lizard arms and legs at rest,
snout flat, trunk fatly bulging?

They threw you a calf's head each day.
 That did you while you waited
 for the delicate horned foot to come 25
 stepping through the grass.
 In your blinking eye still waits
 a massive writhe and lunge,
 the crackle of small bones
 and a parting swirl of muddy water. 30

Rowland Molony

Nightfall in Soweto

Nightfall comes like
 a dreaded disease
 seeping through the pores
 of a healthy body
 and ravaging it beyond repair 5

A murderer's hand,
 lurking in the shadows,
 clasping the dagger,
 strikes down the helpless victim.
 I am the victim. 10

I am slaughtered
 every night in the streets.
 I am cornered by the fear
 gnawing at my timid heart;
 in my helplessness I languish. 15

Man has ceased to be man
 Man has become beast
 Man has become prey.

I am the prey;
 I am the quarry to be run down 20
 by the marauding beast
 let loose by cruel nightfall
 from his cage of death.

Where is my refuge?
 Where am I safe? 25
 Not in my matchbox house
 Where I barricade myself against nightfall.

I tremble at his crunching footsteps,
 I quake at his deafening knock at the door.
 "Open up!" he barks like a rabid dog 30
 thirsty for my blood.

Nightfall! Nightfall!
 You are my mortal enemy.
 But why were you ever created?
 Why can't it be daytime? 35
 Daytime forever more?

Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali

Vuka Paphaphama

You must believe that you can rise –
Vuka paphaphama!
Get up! Get up!
Shed yesterday's memorymuddled sheets,
This is not the time for sleeping. 5
Life is flowing under the tired mattress,
Beyond the dark tightnight curtains a furious sun is beating.

Leave the bed heavy with old excuses and hungry hurts,
This is the time for courage.
Woza, Woza! 10
Grass is springing up between the floorboards
The fear-full house is flooding away
You know that you must rise:
Vuka paphaphama! Get up!

It is time. 15

Ruth Everson

The Dance

She is young. Have I the right
Even to name her? Child,
It is not love I offer
Your quick limbs, your eyes;
Only the barren homage 5
Of an old man whom time
Crucifies. Take my hand
A moment in the dance,
Ignoring its sly pressure,
The dry rut of age, 10
And lead me under the boughs
Of innocence. Let me smell
My youth again in your hair.

R. S. Thomas

Sorrow

Why does the thin grey strand
Floating up from the forgotten
Cigarette between my fingers,
Why does it trouble me?

Ah, you will understand; 5
When I carried my mother downstairs,
A few times only, at the beginning
Of her soft-foot malady,

I should find, for a reprimand
To my gaiety, a few long grey hairs 10
On the breast of my coat; and one by one
I let them float up the dark chimney.

D H Lawrence

Young Girls

With night full of spring and stars we stand
here in this dark doorway and watch the young
girls pass, two, three together, hand in hand.
They are like flowers whose fragrance hasn't sprung
or awakened, whose bodies now dimly feel 5
the flooding, upward welling of the trees;
whose senses, caressed by the wind's soft fingers, reel
with a mild delirium that makes them ill at ease.

They lie awake at night unable to sleep
and walk the streets kindled by strange desires; 10
they steal lightning glances at us, unable to keep
control upon those subterranean fires.
We whistle after them, then laugh, for they
stiffen, not knowing what to do or say.

Raymond Souster

Counting the Beats

You, love, and I,
(He whispers) you and I,
And if no more than only you and I,
What care you or I?

Counting the beats, 5
Counting the slow heart beats,
The bleeding to death of time in slow heart beats,
Wakeful they lie.

Cloudless day,
Night, and a cloudless day, 10
Yet the huge storm will burst upon their heads one day
From a bitter sky.

Where shall we be,
(She whispers) where shall we be,
When death strikes home, O where then shall we be 15
Who were you and I?

Not there but here,
(He whispers) only here,
As we are, here, together, now and here,
Always you and I. 20

Counting the beats,
Counting the slow heart beats,
The bleeding to death of time in slow heart beats,
Wakeful they lie.

Robert Graves

In the Wood of Finvara

I have grown tired of sorrow and human tears;
Life is a dream in the night, a fear among fears,
A naked runner lost in a storm of spears.

I have grown tired of rapture and love's desire;
Love is a flaming heart, and its flames aspire 5
Till they cloud the soul in the smoke of a windy fire.

I would wash the dust of the world in a soft green flood;
Here between sea and sea, in the fairy wood,
I have found a delicate, wave-green solitude.

Here, in the fairy wood, between sea and sea, 10
I have heard the song of a fairy bird in a tree,
And the peace that is not in the world has flown to me.

Arthur Symons

A Broken Family Tree

I am one of many
Small branches of a broken tree,
Always looking to the ones above
For guidance, strength and security.
One little branch trying 5
To keep the others from breaking away.
Who will fall?
And who will stay?
Now I stand alone,
Looking at the earth through the rain, 10
And I see the broken branches I knew
Scattered about me in pain.
There are those who have taken an axe
To the root of our very foundation
And who have passed this destruction 15
Down to every new generation.
If I could take that ax,
I would toss it deep into the sea,
Never to return again
To harm the generations that follow me. 20
I am one of many,
But alone I will go
And plant the new seeds
Where a beautiful tree will grow.

Lori McBride

First Day at School

A millionbillionwillion miles from home
Waiting for the bell to go. (To go where?)
Why are they all so big, other children?
So noisy? So much at home they
Must have been born in uniform 5
Lived all their lives in playgrounds
Spent the years inventing games
That don't let me in. Games
That are rough, that swallow you up.

And the railings. 10
All around, the railings.
Are they to keep out wolves and monsters?
Things that carry off and eat children?
Things you don't take sweets from?
Perhaps they're to stop us getting out 15
Running away from the lessins. Lessin.
What does a lessin look like?
Sounds small and slimy.
They keep them in the classrooms.
Whole rooms made out of glass. Imagine. 20

I wish I could remember my name
Mummy said it would come in useful.
Like wellies. When there's puddles.
Yellowwellies. I wish she was here.
I think my name is sewn on somewhere 25
Perhaps the teacher will read it for me.
Tea-cher. The one who makes the tea.

Roger McGough

Good Bones

Life is short, though I keep this from my children.
Life is short, and I've shortened mine
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,
a thousand deliciously ill-advised ways 5
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative
estimate, though I keep this from my children.
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged, 10
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world
is at least half terrible, and for every kind
stranger, there is one who would break you,
though I keep this from my children. I am trying
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on 15
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,
right? You could make this place beautiful.

Maggie Smith

The Mother

Abortions will not let you forget.
You remember the children you got that you did not get,
The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,
The singers and workers that never handled the air.
You will never neglect or beat 5
Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.
You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
Or scuttle off ghosts that come.
You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,
Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye. 10

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children.
I have contracted. I have eased
My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.
I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
Your luck 15
And your lives from your unfinished reach,
If I stole your births and your names,
Your straight baby tears and your games,
Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches,
and your deaths, 20
If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
Though why should I whine,
Whine that the crime was other than mine?--
Since anyhow you are dead. 25
Or rather, or instead,
You were never made.
But that too, I am afraid,
Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?
You were born, you had body, you died. 30
It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.

Believe me, I loved you all.
Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you
All.

Gwendolyn Brooks